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The entrepreneurship process and the model of volition<sup>☆</sup>Lubica Hikkerova<sup>a,\*</sup>, Samuel Nyock Ilouga<sup>b</sup>, Jean-Michel Sahut<sup>c,1</sup><sup>a</sup> IPAG, 184 Bd Saint-Germain, 75006 Paris, France<sup>b</sup> University of Yaoundé 1, BP 13084 Douala, Cameroon<sup>c</sup> HEG Fribourg – HES-SO, University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland & IPAG, 184 Bd Saint-Germain, 75006 Paris, France

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## ABSTRACT

Volition is a determinant psychological factor in entrepreneurship to better understand the behavior of entrepreneurs. This study analyzes the personal characteristics that determine the route of entrepreneurial actions by analyzing volitional skills of three categories of people: students, potential entrepreneurs, and active entrepreneurs. The results show that individuals mobilize volitional skills in a successive order, one after the other. In addition, this order is determined by the individual's progress on the process of creation that the model of volition in this study synthesizes determines such order.

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## 1. Introduction

Much literature on entrepreneurship focuses on the concept of entrepreneurial intention, viewing much of entrepreneurship as intentional behavior and the formation of an intention to start a business as a step in the process of founding an organization (Kautonen, van Gelderen, & Fink, 2015; Schlaegel & Koenig, 2012). These results show the predictors of the emergence of an entrepreneurial project. However, other questions need approaching: How does a virtual entrepreneurial project turn into an effective project? What are the psychological mechanisms that come into play? These questions have a particular importance in France because the GEM (2014) Global Report reveals that the gap between intentions and actual creations (TEA) is one of the highest in the world. Boissin, Branchet, Emin, and Herbert (2009)

make the same observation, comparing entrepreneurship intentions and actions of French and American students. This gap is also the reason why some researchers, such as Fayolle and Linan (2014), notice that, in entrepreneurship research, an urgent need exists to empirically investigate the intention–behavior link.

In business, highly motivated people with a strong intention to perform an action are very commonly unable to perform the necessary actions to realize this intention. For psychologists such as Gollwitzer and Heckhausen (1987) and Oettingen, Hönig, and Gollwitzer (2000), the inherent difficulties in achieving such a goal, despite a challenging environment and a high level of motivation, evokes a lack of individual characteristics, which studies typically conceive as a “skill,” the volition. More recently, Broonen (2010) emphasizes this idea; for him, volition is the process that determines the transition from intention to action.

Thus, the overall objective of this study is to identify a set of volitional factors that may contribute to the prediction of entrepreneurial intention and explain the transformation of intentions into entrepreneurial actions. The approach aims to demonstrate that entrepreneurship is a goal that the individual pursues, and receives therefore much more influence from personal dispositions than economic and environmental constraints. In particular, the study highlights personal dynamics in the structure, maturation, and production of a range of entrepreneurial careers to extract the volitional characteristics of this career choice. The study tests the hypotheses on volition using data collected through a questionnaire conducted with French students and entrepreneurs, to identify the volition skills of each population and explore how they mobilize these skills during the entrepreneurial process.

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: lubica.hikkerova@ipag.fr (L. Hikkerova), nyock.ilouga@gmail.com (S.N. Ilouga), jmsahut@gmail.com (J.-M. Sahut).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +331 53 63 36 00.

The structure of the study is as follows. Section 2 presents the corpus of literature to which this study contributes and the theoretical framework. Section 3 presents the method, and the empirical analysis. Finally, section 4 comprises the discussion of the findings and their implications for different stakeholders.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis

This research builds on the theories of planned behavior and reasoned action, which explain entrepreneurial behavior through an intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2014). Among these models, those which integrate, even partially, motivational and volitional factors seem most likely to predict business start-up intentions and subsequent behavior (Gelderens van, Kautonen, & Fink, 2015). Indeed, an adequate approach cannot simply consider the background of intention in terms of motivation because an individual that does not feel comfortable with the pursuit of his or her purpose or professional project must use his or her volitional resources to achieve that purpose (Forstmeier & Rüdell, 2008). Gelderen van et al. (2015) study vocational skills only in the form of self-control. They show that action doubt, action fear, and action aversion are less likely to adversely affect a person exercising strong self-control. Some research also highlight the role of self-control. For Wolfe and Johnson (1995), self-control contributes significantly to the prediction of the grade point average of university students; for Steel (2007), self-control is a strong negative predictor of procrastination. However, scholars neglect the other volitional factors such as self-regulation (Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2003; Oettingen et al., 2000).

Volition, the sum of mental events or activities through which agents consciously and actively exercise their agency to voluntarily direct their thoughts and action (Forstmeier & Rüdell, 2008), is an important factor to understand the route to entrepreneurial action, because the time between the formulation of the objective and its implementation can be long (Gollwitzer & Heckhausen, 1987). Then, following the Rubicon model of action phases (Gollwitzer, 2012), the study aims to identify when individuals mobilize volitional skills in the process of taking action. The study distinguishes four phases:

**The pre-decision phase:** This is the process of choosing a type of action, of deciding to perform a behavior. This “mental action” is momentary, which leads to the formation of an intention to perform this behavior depending on the importance of its desirability and feasibility (Mele, 2000), and transforms that behavior into a target (i.e., goal intention), leading the individual to commit to the implementation of specific actions to achieve the pursued objective.

**The pre-action phase:** The intention-goal supports the individual to engage in the implementation of specific actions to achieve the objective. This self-regulation appears as three types of volitional skills, namely, self-determination, self-motivation, and resistance to the uncertainty of the future (Forstmeier & Rüdell, 2008). These skills relate to the psychological functions that the individual uses to maintain a higher order in the hierarchy of objectives.

**The action phase:** In this third phase, the individual realizes her or his objective concretely and mindfully. This phase involves skills of action development, orientation toward action, concentration, and proactivity (Frese, 2007).

Lastly, the goal of the post-action phase is to assess the level of achievement and the need to pursue the goal. In this case, two options are possible: making adjustments or abandoning the goal (Emmons & Ferrari, 1995).

In the same perspective, Espiritu-Olmos and Sastre-Castillo (2015) show that personality traits affect entrepreneurial intention more than work values do. Thus, the hypothesis is that individuals mobilize the volitional skills successively in an order that depends on the progression of the individual on the route to entrepreneurial actions. This idea implies that the self-motivation of the students who formulated entrepreneurship intentions would be better than that of the other students (H1).

**H1.** The self-motivation of the students who formulated entrepreneurship intentions is better than the self-motivation of other students.

In addition, the realization of an entrepreneurial project is a long process that requires an individual's commitment and persistence in pursuit of the goals despite obstacles (Oettingen et al., 2000). In this perspective, recent research underlines that self-regulation is a determinant psychological factor to transform entrepreneurial intentions into actions. In particular, Kraus (2003), Kraus, Frese, Friedrich, and Unger (2005), and Frese (2009) show the role that this factor plays in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientations and actions. These authors establish that a comprehensive psychological approach to entrepreneurial creation and success must incorporate self-regulatory processes. According to this premises, entrepreneurs who conduct their projects as well as potential entrepreneurs use self-regulation, and in particular, self-determination and resistance to uncertainty (Forstmeier & Rüdell, 2008) more than people remaining in the pre-sentence stage (H2).

**H2.** Potential entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs that accomplish their projects mobilize self-regulation, particularly self-determination and resistance to uncertainty, more than people in the pre-sentence stage.

Finally, Frese (2007) states that entrepreneurs are generally more active than non-entrepreneurs, and develops the concept of personal initiative to describe this active orientation. According to Frese, Kring, Soose, and Zempel (1996), active orientation is a personal characteristic that (i) is consistent with the organization's mission, (ii) has a long-term focus, (iii) is goal directed and action oriented, (iv) is persistent in the face of barriers and setbacks, and (v) is self-starting and proactive. Frese (2007) demonstrates that entrepreneurs and especially those of small firms display a higher degree of initiative. Hence, skills of action development (action orientation, concentration, and proactivity) occur more for entrepreneurs in activity than for the potential entrepreneurs and other students (H3).

**Table 1**  
Distribution of the entire sample by status and gender.

	STATUS—EP	STATUS—EA	STATUS—EN	STATUS—IN	STATUS—ET	STATUS—S	Total
Female	244	237	231	479	768	362	2321
%	6.44%	6.26%	6.10%	12.65%	20.27%	9.56%	61.27%
Male	258	264	249	218	255	223	1467
%	6.81%	6.97%	6.57%	5.76%	6.73%	5.89%	38.73%
Total	502	501	480	697	1023	585	3788
%	13.25%	13.23%	12.67%	18.40%	27.01%	15.44%	100.00%

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